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Laos

Poultry and Products

Avian Influenza

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Approved by:

Russ Nicely, Acting Agricultural Counselor
U.S. Embassy, Bangkok

Prepared by:

Russ Nicely, Acting Agricultural Counselor

Report Highlights:

Laos suffered from an outbreak of HPAI (H5N1) Avian Influenza in 2004 that impacted most heavily upon their small commercial broiler industry. The Lao poultry industry is dominated by traditional, smallholder production scattered throughout the country. So far this year there have been no further reports of AI. This report is based upon information obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR, and from the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Bangkok [TH1]
[LA]

Outbreak and Response

The first confirmed report of a HPAI (H5N1) Avian Influenza outbreak among domestic poultry flocks in Laos occurred 14 January 2004. Reports of further outbreaks continued until 4 March 2004. No other outbreaks have been reported as of the date of this report, even though the surrounding countries of Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia all have had subsequent confirmed outbreaks. No human infections have been reported in Laos.

After the confirmation of a HPAI outbreak in Laos, the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Department of Livestock and Fisheries (DLF), National Animal Health Center requested immediate assistance from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. FAO agreed to provide assistance, both as part of an emergency regional response program and in country specific activities. The DLF also took action and instituted a "stamping out" culling program for all birds within 3 kilometers of identified outbreak sites. FAO assisted Laos in establishing an Emergency Disease Task Force to coordinate efforts, rehabilitate animal laboratory facilities in Vientiane for confirmatory testing, and in organizing training for Lao officials in surveillance, culling, and disposal/disinfection techniques. The Lao Department of Planning of MAF indicated in a national workshop that compensation plans had been drawn up, but many details remained to be worked out, including whether or not farmers would be directly compensated. At the time of this report it was not clear if the plan had a funding source.

A total of 45 outbreaks were confirmed, with 42 of these occurring on commercial enterprises (broiler and layer farms), 38 of these in Vientiane, the capital and primary city of Laos. Another five outbreaks were found in Savannakhet Province (on one layer farm and in smallholder flocks) and another two in Champasak Province (on layer farms). Smallholders who found AI in their flocks were located nearby commercial operations suffering the disease.

The initial assessment of losses due to HPAI identified 50,670 dead birds. The Lao government's stamping out efforts culled another 100,250 birds on 39 commercial operations in the Vientiane area and 3 others in Champasak and Savannakhet provinces. Economic impacts were most severely felt by the commercial broiler operations and some quail farms, mostly due to market inactivity after the initial culling efforts. Restocking efforts varied, with commercial farms taking between two to eight months to fully restock, after receiving some assistance from the Lao government and FAO. It was reported that some farms in Champasak province were restocked with chicks from Thailand, in spite of the ban on imports. Some producers switched completely away from poultry into fish farming, cattle, and hog production.

An Active Surveillance Survey, funded by France, was conducted from May to November 2004, to identify the spread of the disease within Laos. Villages in each of the eighteen provinces were examined, including selected "at risk" districts where outbreaks were known to have occurred. Testing indicated no further infections of HPAI, but high levels of antibodies to Newcastle disease and Bronchitis were found. Foul Cholera is another disease routinely occurring among the Lao poultry flocks during the cold season (December to February). Poultry populations among the examined villages experienced no massive die-offs, other than in the outbreak locations.

Other efforts to combat the spread of the disease include a national workshop on post AI rehabilitation plans held in September, 2004, a public awareness campaign utilizing print media and radio which started in December, 2004, and will run until May, 2005, and a closing of the Lao-Thai border to poultry imports from Thailand.

Poultry Industry in Laos

The poultry industry in Laos is predominantly one of smallholders, raising free-range, local chicken breeds nearby their dwellings for meat and eggs, mostly consumed by the household or sold locally for income. Laos is a country of small villages, with only a few major cities. An average village has around 350 chickens, ducks, turkeys and quail being raised in small flocks interspersed among village homes by about 78 families, with women primarily responsible for the flocks. Ducks, turkey, and quail are also raised, with negligible amounts of geese found scattered around the country. The few commercial operations (less than 100 total, with 89 of these located near Vientiane) in the country supply nearby metropolitan areas. It is estimated that less than 25 percent of all poultry production is produced on the commercial farms. Production is oriented to domestic consumption. Local breeds account for 87 percent of total poultry production, with ducks next at 9 percent, followed by commercial breeds of layers and broilers at 2 percent each. There are some smaller commercial operations (defined as 100 birds or more, up to a maximum of 10,000 birds) of broilers or layers, mostly clustered in the Vientiane city area. Savannakhet and Champasak are the other two major production areas. Total poultry population is estimated at about 14 million birds (2001), heavily concentrated in Vientiane Province (3.2 million), Savannakhet Province (2.9 million), and Champasak Province (1.4 million). Biosecurity and technology utilization are minimal, with little available veterinary care from either private or government sources.

Impact on Poultry Trade

The stamping out efforts fell most heavily on the commercial broiler operations, especially in Vientiane, leading to a drop in available supplies of broilers in January, 2004, and after, but local market prices remained unaffected as smallholder production was able to supply demand. The majority of layer operations appeared to remain profitable through the year. Many poultry smallholders immediately switched their purchases of new stock to ducks. Normally, for every duckling purchased, three to four chicks are bought. After the AI outbreak, this ratio reversed direction, with about two ducklings being sold for every chick sold. The prices for day-old chicks jumped from 3000 kip to 5000 kip (10,500 kip = 1 USD), while ducklings remained at 4000 kip each. Imports from Thailand, a primary source for day-old chicks, were banned. It is unclear if poultry imports from China and Vietnam have been addressed. The five border checkpoints with Thailand were all instructed to be vigilant in turning back poultry imports, but effective policing of the border trade along the Mekong remains extremely difficult to implement.

End of Report.